Lostine Corridor Public Safety Project
RECREATION

Introduction

Recreation was identified as one of the five Outstanding Remarkable Values (ORVs) when the Lostine Corridor was designated as a Wild and Scenic River. People have been enjoying the Lostine Corridor as a recreation destination for almost a century, as a place to picnic and camp in developed sites, and to fish and enjoy the river. The dense forest canopy has provided thermal relief during the heat of summer. The corridor also has several trailheads that provide staging for travel into the Eagle Cap Wilderness for hikers, horse users and hunters.

Declining forest health is affecting current recreation experiences by changes in scenic quality and increases in downed trees in recreation sites and on the roadways, blocking access to recreation opportunities. The increase in hazard trees is increasing the risks to public safety for those traveling in and using the corridor.

This report has two primary purposes:

1. To disclose the effects of the proposed action on recreation resources.
2. To determine whether the proposed actions are consistent with Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Plan direction and the Lostine River Wild and Scenic River Management Plan.

Proposed Action

The primary purpose and need of this project is to address the public safety issues in the corridor. Secondly, the project will address risks to the other values in the corridor including infrastructure (homes, cabins, recreation improvements, roads), the natural resource values. To reduce risks to these values the Forest Service is proposing the following within the project area boundary (approx. 2,110 acres):

- Removing hazard trees along travel routes and adjacent to residential, recreation, historic and improvements (addressing immediate hazards to people and infrastructure).
- Thinning stand densities to decrease severity of wildfire and to improve forest resiliency (addressing both risks to ingress and egress in the corridor in the event of wildfire, and risk of insect and disease impacts over the long term).
- Removing fuels (surface fuels, ladder fuels, and small woody debris) throughout the corridor, particularly in the wildland urban interface.
- Creating small (less than 2 acre) gaps/openings in lodge pole stands to break up continuous fuels so fire could be managed more effectively.

The project will also assess opportunities to provide wood products for local markets, including firewood, through implementation.

Analysis Framework and Direction

Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Plan (1990)

Management direction is derived from the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). In reviewing the Forest Plan the goal for the Recreation resources is, to "*…provide a wide variety of recreation opportunities in an attractive setting, and make those opportunities available to all segments of society".* (Forest Plan, pg. 4-2)

Lostine River Wild and Scenic River Management Plan (1993)

The Lostine River Wild and Scenic River Management Plan (River Plan) established the following goals for 11 miles of the Lostine River and corridor designed as a 'recreational' river:

- To *"... provide a combination of recreational activities including hunting, fishing, sightseeing, horseback riding, hiking, snowmobiling, and camping".*
- To *"... provide dispersed camping as well as developed camping and other recreation activities include picnicking, mushroom picking, photography, and skiing"* as well as other uses

The River Plan describes several relevant desired future conditions for recreation:

- The recreational section of the Lostine River will be free of impoundments and be readily accessible from roads. Some major public use facilities such as developed campgrounds administrative buildings, bridges, or private residences will remain within the corridor.
- Timber harvest and other activities may occur and be evident near the river; management shall protect and enhance outstandingly remarkable values, free flow and other river-related values.
- A range of recreational opportunities will be available in settings in which interactions are relatively high and visitors are likely to share their recreational experience with other individuals or groups.
- Emphasis will be on improving the quality of the present recreation facilities rather than on expanding facilities to accommodate an increase in recreational use.
- Maintain the existing Recreational Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) of 'Roaded Natural' for the recreational section of the river.

Existing Condition

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum

The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class for the project area is Roaded Natural (River Plan, pg. 8).

Table 1. Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class and settings features relevant to the proposed action (Forest Plan pg. 4-40).

ROS Class	ROS Settings Features Relevant to the Proposed Action
Roaded Natural (2,110 acres)	• Timber harvest may be scheduled • Visual Quality Objectives (VQO) of 'retention' as seen from roads and trails are met • Visitors have the opportunity to interact with the natural environment, but the risk and challenge associated with the Semi-primitive motorized settings is not present.

Recreation Activities

Dispersed Recreation

Dispersed camping is a popular activity for overnight users who do not camp in a developed campground. There are 10 identified dispersed campsites. These campsites receive low to moderate use beginning in late spring with the majority of sites showing heaviest use during summer months and the fall hunting season. Many of these campsites have been used for decades.

Developed Recreation Sites

In general, the majority of visitor use occurs during the summer and fall hunting season and decreases in November. There are 13 developed recreation sites within the project area. Use levels vary considerably from site to site, although they generally experience lower usage in the spring and early summer, to moderate to high use during the summer, and moderate to high in peak holiday weekends. There are 3 trailheads and 4 trails within the project area, as well as 2 interpretive trails.

Table 2. Developed Recreation Sites

Recreation Site	PAOTS
Pole Bridge Picnic Area	20
Canyon CG	8
Williamson CG	36
Walla Walla CG	16
Irondyke CG	20
Bowman/Francis TH	110
Turkey Flat	16
French Camp Picnic Area	30
Arrow CG	12
Shady CG	56
Maxwell TH	40
Two Pan TH	250

PAOTS – 'People At One Time' site capacity, as determined by number of campsites and/or parking spaces.

Permitted Uses

There are several long-term recreation special use permits operating within the project area. Most use occurs during the fall during hunting seasons. The area is popular during big game and bow and rifle seasons in late summer and fall and bear and turkey hunting in the late fall and early spring.

Effects Analysis Methodology

Datasets

The method of analysis included:

- A review of the appropriate Forest Service policy and goals, objectives and standards of the Forest Plan
- An analysis of the Forest Plan recreation opportunity spectrum (ROS)

- Project site visits
- A review of Forest-level recreation use surveys
- A review of the USDA Forest Service literature related to recreation management
- Data base queries for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest GIS data base queries (i.e. dispersed recreation points, developed recreation points, management areas)
- Data base queries for the USDA Forest Service I-web data base

Spatial and Temporal Context for Effects Analysis

The environmental effects will be discussed in different timeframes. The short term effects to recreational visitors is viewed as occurring during implementation and within two years or 2 visitation seasons from the beginning of the implementation activity (i.e. treatment and post-treatment activities. Long term is viewed as a period of time ranging from two to ten plus years after initiating the implementation activity (i.e.short term = treatment and long term = post-treatment activities are completed).

Environmental Consequences

Effects

The specific project activities (treatments) with potential to effect recreation:

Table 3. Predicted Effects from Proposed Activities on Recreation Values

Treatment Activity	Effects Summary	Effects Timeline*	Mitigation Measures
Timber Harvest (felling, yarding, decking and transporting trees)	• Disturbance/displacement of visitors due to physical obstacles (i.e. slash), dust and noise	ST – during operation	Implement some actions during low use season where feasible to reduce impacts to recreation users
Fuels Treatments (piling and burning fuels, grinding/chipping, lop and scatter)	• Change of scenery, natural features or wildlife viewing opportunities (i.e. reduce views of dense stands, increase views of middle and background scenes). • Change conditions/habitat for collecting forest products (such as berries or mushrooms). May improve opportunities for products that benefit from more open stand conditions, but decrease opportunities for products that benefit from denser stand conditions. • Increases localized use by visitors wanting more open stands, and decreases localized use by visitors wanting more closed or untreated stands	ST and LT ST and LT ST and LT	Restrict thinning activities directly adjacent to recreation sites to minimize noise disturbances Treat slash as soon as feasible after treatment Deck logs (except those available for personal firewood) away from high use areas to reduce visual impact Retain some screening around rec sites where does not contribute to fuel hazard Low cut stumps in areas easily seen from main road and campgrounds
Removal of Danger/Hazard Trees	• Increases visitor safety	ST through 5 years. Will still require annual reviews	Limit hazard tree removal low visitor use periods (spring and early summer), when possible

* ST = short term effect (w/in present to 2 years). LT – long term affect (greater than 2 years)

Proposed actions are intended to improve public safety in the corridor in the sort-term by reducing risks from hazard/danger trees, increasing the ability to safely exit the corridor in the event of a wildfire by reducing fuels adjacent to the road, and reducing the severity of effects on the outstanding social and resource values in the corridor from a disturbance event (fire, insect or disease). There are expected to be both short and long-term positive effects from the proposed actions.

Proposed actions may have negative effects in the short term during project implementation on the recreation experience through changes to the setting. Visitor experience may be impacted during operations by the sights and sounds of equipment and may be unable to access certain recreation sites (dispersed camps or trailheads). Transportation of wood material on log or chip trucks may discourage use by visitors who are not comfortable navigating narrow forest roads with the presence of large trucks. Thinning and fuel reduction activities will change forested stands appearance, with more open canopies and sunlight filtering into the forest floor. Visitors who prefer dense or dark stands may decrease their use of the corridor. There may be a change in the availability of certain forest products such as berries (may increase due to more open stand conditions) or mushrooms (may increase or decrease depending on sun tolerance for different species). There may also be short-term disturbances to permitted outfitter and guide operations in the corridor.

Declining forest health is affecting current recreation experiences by changes in scenic quality (see above) and increases in downed trees in recreation sites and on roadways, often blocking access to recreation opportunities. An increase in hazard trees is also increasing the risks to public safety for those traveling in and using the corridor.

The proposed actions are intended to reduce the risk of impacts to the recreation setting, forested stands, and recreation infrastructure from a potential wildfire or insect and disease event. While the density of the forested stands would be reduced under the proposed actions, there would still be sufficient canopy to provide thermal cover, particularly since thinning activities would be concentrated away from most recreation sites. In addition, the remaining stands would be more resilient to potential impacts and would appear healthier (reduction in dead and dying trees). The healthier stand conditions and removal of trees identified as a hazard would reduce the risks to public safety and allow people to better access recreation opportunities.

There will likely be short term effects on recreation during project implementation including the sights and sounds of a harvest operation which may reduce the quality of the recreation experience for some visitors. Where feasible, the harvest operations would occur during the season when recreation use is low (late fall, winter, spring) to mitigate these potential effects. There are no predicted long-term negative effects on recreation.

Cumulative Effects

There has no recent or proposed future recreation projects proposed in the Lostine Corridor and therefore no cumulative recreation effects.

Consistencies

Based on the information documented in this report, the proposed actions under the Lostine Project are found to be consistent with Forest Plan as amended by the Lostine Wild and Scenic River Plan.